''We're projecting [disability] trust funds will be depleted in December of 2016. . . . The shortfall for the ensuing 12 months would come to about $29 billion,'' Goss said. ''What that means is that we could have a tax rate reallocation that could apply in 2016 or 2016 and 2017 that would generate up to $30 billion or even $35 billion transferred to the [disability] trust fund, which would at least extend its reserve depletion date for one more year.''

It's a stop-and-go scenario that serves neither party's goals in the end. Much depends in the interim on Johnson and new Ways and Means Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R–Wis.).

Ryan has boasted that Ways and Means will be ''command central'' for the GOP's agenda, and he has installed his own staff in Johnson's Social Security subcommittee. In the previous Congress, the disability debate among Republicans was shaped by flamboyant personalities such as the now-retired Sen. Tom Coburn (R–Okla.) and Rep. Darrell Issa (R–Calif.), who has had to surrender his platform as chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. But now, Ryan would like to be the architect for reforms in the social safety net.

There is room for compromise. The crisis is no surprise—as long ago as 1995, Social Security's actuaries were predicting 2016 as a breaking point for the disability fund. And multiple academic papers from the center-left and center-right outline changes Congress could consider.

Three potential areas of agreement: First, find a dedicated source of money for Social Security to expedite so-called continuing disability reviews, which have been shown to generate savings. Second, limit recipients' ''double-dipping'' among disability and other government benefits. And third, experiment with ways to help people with disabilities to stay in the workforce or return more quickly.

The past year has seen some turnaround on funding for the disability reviews. In the fiscal 2014 and 2015 Social Security budgets, House Republicans finally agreed to the extra ''program integrity'' appropriations that the budget deal had called for. The Social Security Administration says every dollar spent here can lead to $9 in long-term savings, and in 2013—the latest year for which data are available—more than 17,000 workers were disqualified as a result of these medical reviews.

The administration estimates that as many as 790,000 continuing disability reviews will be conducted this year, a 50 percent increase over 2014 and double the annual average from 2009–2013. To maintain this effort, the 2016 budget that Obama proposes in February is expected to ask again for close to the $1.4 billion provided in 2015.

The White House is also expected to come back to Congress with a set of demonstration programs to test and gather data on the effectiveness of early intervention—with workers and employers—rather than individuals simply surrendering to going on disability. The omnibus bill approved in December provided $35 million for this purpose, far less than what the administration had hoped for.

''I think it's clear that the system needs to be improved,'' said Jeffrey Liebman, a Harvard professor who served in the Office of Management and Budget during Obama's first term. ''I also think it's clear that we don't yet know enough about the cost and benefits of specific proposals to make wholesale changes.''

Part of the challenge for policymakers is the unique nature of disability insurance.

Unlike many other disability programs, Social Security's covers only total disability—not partial or short term. Benefits are a function of how much a worker previously earned and put into the system, but on average these run under $1,200 per month. On top of this, a worker is allowed to earn some outside income, but this is capped at less than $1,100 a month.

The result is that many households can be locked in at 200 percent of poverty or lower once the decision is made to go on disability. That's why early intervention can help both the government and the worker. But how early to intervene—and at what cost—remain big questions.

''They are really only biting at the outer edges of the issue. Their idea of early intervention is way too late,'' said Richard Burkhauser of Cornell University and the University of Melbourne. Burkhauser argues that the U.S. must look to European countries like the Netherlands that ''have really done major things that have fundamentally altered their system.''

The Dutch model, for example, requires employers to cover more of the first two years of disability costs, thereby encouraging more management involvement in trying to help employees rehabilitate themselves and stay in the workforce. Yet selling this to a pro-business Republican Congress may take more than a little doing.

''The Dutch still spend more of [gross domestic product] than we do on disability benefits,'' Liebman said. ''They came from spending a lot more than we do to spending more than we do.''

Johnson is certainly not eager for big new expenditures. But for all his famous crustiness, the Texas conservative was not unsympathetic to people who depend on the current system.

''We want to work to protect the disability program, but we want to consider how to help those who can and want to work,'' Johnson said. ''And those who can or want to work ought not to be sentenced to a lifetime of near poverty with no way out.''

For all the partisanship now, the disability insurance program was born in the mid-1950s under a Republican president, Dwight Eisenhower. Ronald Reagan triggered bitter fights 25 years later when he sought cuts in the early 1980s. That sparked a backlash from Democrats in Congress, which led to changes making it easier for more people to qualify.

But the enrollment numbers really took off in the mid-1990s, as more baby boomers moved into their late 40s and began applying during an otherwise strong economy. The Great Recession accelerated this trend as workers turned to disability as a last resort after unemployment benefits ran out. But the prime mover for the past 20 years has been demographics—changes set in motion generations ago.

These include not just the baby boom, but the fact that women have worked long enough now to qualify for disability benefits. All this comes, most importantly, at a time when the drop in birth rates has left fewer younger workers to help absorb the costs.

If all these forces make disability insurance the black sheep now, it will soon have company: The retirement side of Social Security is feeling the same forces, while new enrollment numbers suggest the spike in disability has peaked. Data show a steady drop in the number of new disability awards since their high in 2010.

''The increasing effects of [disability insurance] are over. We're done with that,'' Goss said. ''The bad news is now the boomers are moving to the higher ages and once they get there, they'll have the lower-birth-rate generation below them. . . . This is unfortunately kind of like the tide.''

As the waters recede, rural low-income states like Kentucky, Arkansas, Mississippi and Maine face a larger concentration of disability cases as a percentage of the population. Workers complain of a slow, almost Dickensian application process that can put their lives on hold for months. This same environment can attract aggressive attorneys, who boast in phone book ads that this is their briar patch—just call.

Fresh indictments this past week in Puerto Rico are a reminder of the risk of fraud—and collusion among doctors, lawyers and administrative judges. Government Accountability Office reports have raised questions about workers double-dipping, by stringing together payments from Social Security disability along with jobless benefits or non-combat-related disabilities covered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

None of this alters the 2016 deadline.

''The trust fund programs really are special because they cannot borrow. The reserves deplete. Congress has to act,'' Goss said. ''We'll still have revenue come in, but our projection is we'll only have 81 cents of tax revenue coming at that time for every dollar of benefits.''

But under the new House rule, Goss said, any single piece of legislation can give the program at most ''a one-year or slightly more than a one-year extension of the reserve depletion date.''

Does that mean Congress should do more than one year?

The actuary chuckled. ''The good news,'' he said, ''is that given we have 535 members of Congress, we'll hear lots of arguments and that will likely be one.''

ENDING THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that my colleagues would agree that we have many needs in our districts. For example, my district has an inlet that cannot be dredged, which causes an economic problem. And the reason it cannot be dredged is because of lack of funds. We continue to spend billions of dollars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but there is no money for necessary infrastructure projects back here in North Carolina and across the Nation.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have been outspoken on the continuation of war in Afghanistan. I would like to recite a segment from Rudyard Kipling's poem, ''Epitaphs of the War,'' as Ron Paul did when we went into Iraq: ''If any question why we died, tell them because our fathers lied.''

Mr. Speaker, a recent letter to the editor of the Marine Corps Times echoed the same sentiment. Bryan Chou wrote:

> ''Remember the part I said about ending the Marines' presence in Afghanistan? I lied,'' said every politician.

I assume Mr. Chou was referring to the President's recent statement that the war in Afghanistan is over.

How can the war be over when we just committed to a 10-year bilateral security agreement with Afghanistan to keep thousands of troops there while spending millions of dollars? The Afghan Parliament voted on the bilateral security agreement while we in Congress had no discussion and no debate.

According to the Constitution, the President does not need to come to Congress for permission on an agreement, but I think we have a responsibility to the American taxpayer and our men and women in uniform to discuss an agreement that will keep more taxpayer dollars and more troops in Afghanistan in the coming years.

Just a couple of weeks ago the Marine Corps announced that the marines at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina's Third District, which I represent, are getting ready to deploy to Afghanistan. When does it end, Mr. Speaker? When does it end?

I would like to quote Grant Filbeck from Erie, Pennsylvania, who wrote a letter to the Marine Corps Times last week about Afghanistan:

> I believe in the mission 100 percent, but we have given the Afghans the tools to succeed, and it's up to them to use them. We have been in the country for more than 13 years. That is ridiculous. We have spent so much money funding these guys. If the Afghans want to fight for their country, then they will, or the Taliban will take over without much of a fight.

These two men whose letters I referenced are marines who have been to Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, this is a poster from a book titled, ''How U.S. Taxpayers Bankroll the Taliban.'' It was written several years ago by Douglas Wissing. It is a great expose on how the taxpayers' money ends up in the hands of the Taliban, to kill Americans and to blow up the buildings that we built for them with taxpayer money.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, we owe it to the American people, our military, and our Constitution to debate war. As James Madison wrote: ''The power to declare war, including the power of judging the causes of war, is fully and exclusively vested in the legislature.'' I agree with James Madison and urge the Congress to meet its constitutional duty to debate war and not let any President have an AUMF to send our young men and women overseas to die and see the taxpayers' money wasted.

May God continue to bless our troops, and may God continue to bless America.

A SQUANDERED OPPORTUNITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. MCCLINTOCK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my deep disappointment in the address by the President last night in this Chamber.

Twenty years ago, President Clinton was in a similar position. He realized his policies weren't working; they had just been overwhelmingly rejected by voters and he faced the first Republican Congress in 40 years. So in his State of the Union Message 20 years ago, President Clinton changed course, proclaiming: ''The era of Big Government is over.'' And he made good on that proclamation. He reached across the aisle to the Republican Congress, and together they achieved some amazing things for the American people.

Together, they reduced Federal spending by a remarkable 4 percent of GDP. They reformed entitlement spending—in Bill Clinton's words, ''ending welfare as we know it.'' They approved what amounted to the biggest capital gains tax cut in American history. They produced the only four balanced budgets that we have seen in 50 years.

And the economy blossomed. We enjoyed one of the longest periods of economic expansion in our Nation's history.

It wasn't a bipartisan lovefest. They clashed bitterly on matters great and small. Yet their accomplishments produced prosperity for our Nation and ensured President Clinton's popularity that endures to this day.

President Obama thus has a working, proven model to salvage the last 2 years of his failed Presidency, and instead, he is squandering it. The President says he wants to sock it to the wealthy by placing new and heavy taxes on investment. But the simple truth of the matter is, when you tax something, you get less of it. When you tax investment, you get less investment at precisely that time when our economy desperately needs greater investment for more and better-paying jobs.

A smaller percentage of our people are working today than at any time in more than 30 years. Until last year, median family income had fallen throughout this administration. The American people don't want more government handouts. They need more jobs and better jobs, and that means more investment, not less. They need a job market that isn't flooded with millions of illegal immigrants undercutting their wages and opportunities. Indeed, it was recently estimated that the number of illegal immigrants working in direct defiance of Federal law is as much as the net increase in jobs throughout this administration. Most Americans are not getting ahead.

We now suffer the highest corporate tax rate in the industrialized world, and American businesses are fleeing from it.

Who would have thought that socialist Sweden would today be considered a tax haven compared to the United States? Our people need those American jobs back in America.

Yet the President seeks to raise taxes still further at a time when the Federal Government is already extracting record tax revenues from our people. The percentage of our economy now consumed by Federal taxes is well above the 40-year average. Our economic problems are not the fault of taxpayers for not paying enough taxes.

The President says he wants to help the middle class, but the proposals he set before us last night would drag the middle class still further down the dark road of debt and doubt and despair that we have been on. If higher taxes and more burdensome regulations were the path to prosperity, we should be enjoying a new economic golden age today. If higher government spending and soak-the-rich policies were the antidote to income inequality, we should today be enjoying an egalitarian paradise.

The reality is these policies have never worked. They have suppressed what should have been a robust economic recovery. They have increased the economic inequalities in our society. They have buried our children under a mountain of debt that will stalk them for the rest of their lives.

The answer to income inequality and economic stagnation is genuine economic growth that requires reducing the burdens that government has placed on our economy. It worked when Bill Clinton did it, when Ronald Reagan did it, and when John F. Kennedy did it. In fact, Kennedy was right: a rising tide lifts all boats. Yet Barack Obama clings obstinately to the opposite policies. It shouldn't surprise us that he is getting the opposite results.

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He had a fleeting opportunity last night to bend to the will of the voters, reverse these policies, and redeem his place in history. Instead, Whittier's words seem appropriate this morning:

> Of all sad words of tongue or pen, this saddest are these: ''It might have been.''

HONORING WILLIAM M. ALLEN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. JOLLY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JOLLY. Mr. Speaker, this past December, the community of Pinellas County, Florida—indeed, the Nation—lost an American hero, William M. Allen.

Bill Allen was 83 years old and had served in the United States Army from 1949 to 1953 as a sergeant, Charlie Company, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division.

Mr. Allen was a prisoner of war from January 1, 1951, until August 1953, held captive during the Korean war after being overcome by Chinese troops. Mr. Allen was just 19 years old at the time.

To those who knew Mr. Allen, he was one of those remarkable people that left a lasting impression on you after just a single encounter. He was a patriot. He would share his stories not for his own attention, but to impart on each of us the story of sacrifice that our men and women in uniform make so that the United States—all Americans—might live in peace, protected by those who serve.

Mr. Allen's story was most human. In his own words, he wrote this about his enlistment in the Army and subsequent deployment:

> Then there are people like myself, the little guy who went to Korea as a young kid, still wet behind the ears, fresh out of high